

Picking Sides

The Role Playing Game

by

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Please Note: This free role-playing game is based on a novel called Picking Sides: The Seven Deadly Sins of Jonathan Sykes also written by Stacy Gossett. That novel can be read about and/or purchased at: www.mynubook.com.

There was only ever the void and the universes. The nearly empty spaces between universes and the universes themselves had existed together always. Once, the universes were restricted to the smallest area of space (a point) until the “Big Bang.” The universes had been created out of the seven elements that the Creator itself was made of and had made the angels out of before humanity existed. There are seven orders of angels, just as there are seven different kinds of angels. And, there were seven different reasons for them to go to war among themselves as well.

The angels were very surprised when they noticed the Creator creating something new. These human beings were endowed with a smaller spark of

creation than were the angels; and, at first, they were ignored. But, that was not for long. Human beings have all seven Elements present in their forms, but one is always more prevalent than the other six. Some human beings can even focus the power of their spark to create miraculous feats. This game is mostly about them.

The Seven Elements

Note: it is up to the GM if s/he wants to include this section in his/her gaming or not.

Fire (related to Wrath) – This Element includes energy in all its forms.

While aggression and self interest are important to survival of the species, too much of this Element in a person's life can cause serious problems.

Physical abuse, verbal abuse, violent crimes, irrational rages, a need for vengeance for (possibly) imagined wrongs, causing harm to the self (cutting, for example), and just serious anger issues are signs that the subject's soul is infused with too much of the Fire Element. Mental conditions mimic those of a victim of paranoia in some cases. Patience seems to be the only way to combat these effects.

A lack of this Element in the soul, while not near as detrimental as an overabundance of the Element, does make one more docile and easily

swayed by others. Moderation is generally suggested, as with all the Elements.

Water (related to Envy) – This Element includes all minds and sentience itself. While it is natural to notice other people and their possessions/advantages, it is not natural to wish ill will on another, simply because of those advantages. An excess of the Water Element in the soul causes this jealous complex in the subject. Those suffering from this condition, especially in a group, can cause major problems. While the jealous one tries to make up the imagined difference, others in the group must deal with the envious behavior.

Too little of the Element can cause people to be oblivious to details about their fellow man, even to the point of being too apathetic about their own advantages/advancement/condition.

Earth (related to Gluttony) – This includes the natural materials of the earth. Those overcome by the Earth Element are generally suffering from an addiction to smoking, alcoholic beverages, narcotics, prescription drugs, food, etc. Low amounts of the Element can cause a fixation on loss of weight via anorexia or bulimia. Moderation is generally the best idea.

Air (related to Sloth) – This Element is made up of the space-time continuum. Too much of the Air Element causes one to be lethargic. Too little of the Element makes an individual seem like they are experiencing a manic episode. These people find that they just cannot stop themselves from moving (much like ADHD). The medium route tends to allow for a regular mode of action and rest.

Wood (related to Lust) – This Element includes all life itself. While lust is good for propagation of the human race, too much lust and you crave sex . . . all the time. Too little lust and you can become a cold, frigid person, almost never interested in sex. A balance is generally good.

Metal (related to Greed) – This Element is made up of man-made materials, tools, and technical acumen/creativity. While a certain amount of equipment/invention is important, those with too much of the Metal Element crave physical objects. They want the most money, the best cars, and the latest palm pilot/technology, etc. Those without enough of the Element; however, are like a manic who tries to give everything away or, at least, does not value technology enough for their own good.

Spirit (related to Pride) – This Element includes the Spirit World and those beings that exist there (primarily angels, ghosts, and daemons). While Pride is important to the human concept of self-worth, those with too much of this Element devalue their fellow man on a massive scale. Human beings are peons or pawns who exist merely to serve the plans of this deluded person. Too little of the Element, and the subject becomes a follower led by those around him.

General Description of What Element

Manipulation Can Do

For the most part, characters in this game are very much human, except that they have a certain predisposition for one of the Creator's Seven Elements (because a powerful spark of one of these Elements resides within this character's soul). This spark allows the character to manipulate the universe in ONE of seven ways:

Fire – sense/control/create energy

Water – sense/control minds

Earth – sense/shape/create naturally-occurring matter

Air – sense/affect space-time

Wood – sense/change living shapes/people's health (and bodies)

Metal – sense/affect man-made matter

Spirit – sense/ summon spirits; travel through the Spirit World

Character Creation

While you're thinking about which Element is going to be your focus, there are other things that need to be decided.

1. Name. Come up with any appropriate-sounding name.
2. Job? What does your character do?
3. Flaw? What is the character's worst flaw? Choose between: wrath, envy, gluttony, sloth, lust, greed, or pride. This should really be played out in the game for extra experience and fun.

Which Element would you as player want to play out? Which Element from those above (fire, water, earth, air, wood, metal, or spirit—

Connected with the Flaw above) is most appealing to you to play out?

Which can you play out the best? See the paragraphs above again to make a choice.

4. Choose height, weight, hair, eyes, race, and orientation as you see fit (what makes the best sense for your character).
5. The character's Level is most often set at 3rd for those just starting, but do consult your game master to make sure.
6. Usually, players divide 280 points (though this could be more or less, depending on your game master) between their characters' seven attributes: agility, strength, endurance, intelligence, belief, manipulation, and technology.

Please note that 90% is the highest percentage a character can have in this game without some supernatural aide of some kind in attributes and skills.

Agility – The attribute of the character that quantifies a character's manual dexterity, overall coordination, quickness to act, etc.

Strength – It measures the physical force that a character can apply to pick up, carry, or simply attack another. +1 damage, cumulatively (every 10%

thereafter), starting at 50%. For example, at 50% there is a +1, at 60% there is a +2, at 70% there is a +3, at 80% there is a +4, and at 90% there is a +5.

Endurance – Relatively speaking, how durable the character is physically to harm, disease, etc.

Intelligence – Measures the character's general level of knowledge

Belief – Measures a character's belief in his current system of beliefs (choose one) and knowledge of a certain religion/world view

Manipulation – Measures the character's ability to affect another through beauty, charm, wit, or threats (generally the character picks only one)

Technical Aptitude – Measures the character's general comfort/knowledge with technology

If the GM (game master) calls for a roll on any of your seven basic attributes, the player tries to roll under their score (the number of their attribute) on a d100. The GM may also modify the roll plus or minus thirty

percent (in general), depending on the circumstances encountered. A d100 roll is when the character, before rolling, determines which of two ten-sided dice will be the higher one. When rolled, the higher one is to be the first number in the final number (from 1 to 100), and the second number is to be second number in the final number. For instance, Dave's character Twyla is trying to climb up a slippery embankment. Dave looks at his sheet and sees that Twyla has a 40% to climb with her Agility. However, the game master says that Twyla loses 10%, because the embankment is slippery. That means that Twyla temporarily has a 30% chance to scale the embankment. Dave determines which die is first and rolls both at the same time. The higher die rolls a '1'. The lower die rolls a '3'. That means that Dave scores a '13', which is very good, sense it is below the 30% chance. Twyla succeeds, even though the embankment is very slippery. A '01' means one percentile, an excellent roll. And, a '00' means a score of one hundred, generally a bad thing.

Skills & Experience

Skills are attributes that may come into play instead of your basic attributes. They are based on the D100 system, so they can range from 0-90. No skill ever goes above 90. If the character has no relevant skill, the character can

use an appropriate attribute (generally, minus 30%, depending on the game master and the situation). If the Attribute is higher than the skill, GMs may add percentile to the roll, as s/he sees fit. GMs will also have to decide when a character reaches the next Level. That's completely up to the GM, but more than a lifetime might not be too much. The characters can be reincarnated, if the players agree with the GM on that.

Game masters can modify the roll (generally plus or minus 30 percentiles). Skills can be given a chance to go up through use by one point, if the GM agrees that the character has used it enough within a game to warrant a roll after each session. Any number under the skill score and the score goes up by one. Otherwise, there is no change in the skill.

7. The player chooses appropriate skills for his character, dividing 280 percentiles (or more or less, according to the GM) among his character's skills. None can be above 90, and the GM may decide to put a further cap on how high initial skill scores can be. GMs may help players make up additional skills as he/she sees fit.

Some possible skills include: athlete, hand-to-hand, evade, read emotions, write, criminal knowledge, lying, repair, drive, shoot, sword fighting, hide, sneak, woodsman, scholar, computers, money matters, investigate, language, lawyer, doctor, parapsychology, library science, sleuth, government, applied science, and theoretical science.

Many of these, the game master may ask the player to define further. As a character with the language skill, for example, would have to decide which language it is that he knows.

Possible Effects of the Elements in Use

Here are some (but by no means all) of the effects that can be accomplished with these Elements:

All Elements

All Elements work similarly at each level.

Level 1 – Roll the d100. If you roll under your Level score, you succeed. If not, it doesn't work (but you can try again the next round, subject to your game master's approval). Generally, the lower the number, the more information gathered.

Level 2 – Roll d100. Same as above, but you should be able to measure or get more information than just a general knowledge.

Levels 3 thru 6 – These are the levels in which the characters can start actually affecting the environment in ways according to the Element they manipulate. At 3rd Level, the powers generally do not cause damage directly. At 4th Level, if the power works (with the d100 roll), then the game master might allow you to roll a ten-sided die to determine damage or measure of success (higher is better on this roll). Fifth Level usually gets two dice. While Sixth Level generally gets three ten-sided dice for damage or a measure of success. However, for example, healing can be accomplished by the Wood Element at 3rd Level (1d10+1d10/level after 3).

Fire Element

Level 1 - Detect the presence of visible light, sound, heat, electricity, radiation, weather (general); Feel telekinetically

Level 2 – Quantify light, sound, heat, electricity; Detect weather (specific); Direct electricity; Touch telekinetically

Level 3 - Shift light, sound, heat, electricity, weather, radiation; Weak Movement telekinetically

Level 4 - General Control of visible light, sound; Intensify/Create heat, weather; Increase/Decrease electricity; Move telekinetically

Level 5 - Specific Control of visible light (AKA illusions), sound; Shape heat; Shape weather; Lightning; Detailed movement telekinetically

Level 6 - Minute Control of visible light (AKA improved illusions), sound, weather; Immolation; Ball Lightning; Move up to 500 lbs. telekinetically

Water Element

Level 1 – Detect brain activity, faint emanations

Level 2 – Detect lie, emanations

Level 3 – Read minds, Speak with other minds, Project illusive disguise, Scry minor visions

Level 4 – Control emotions, Create advanced illusions, Scry visions

Level 5 – Purge memories, Scry major visions

Level 6 – Control mind, Precognition

Earth Element

Level 1 – Detect natural matter

Level 2 – Quantify natural matter

Level 3 - Create/Change/Destroy a hand full of natural matter

Level 4 – Create/Change/Destroy the mass of the caster in natural matter

Level 5 – Create/Change/Destroy the mass of an automobile in natural matter

Level 6 – Create/Change/Destroy the mass of a house in natural matter

Air Element

Level 1 – Visualize space or time around self or another

Level 2 - Visualize space or time around self or another more specifically

Level 3 – Commune with space or time in the local area (or cause someone else to)

Level 4 – Affect the time or space of the self or another in a general area or on one's self

Level 5 – Move to specific area; Move another to a specific area; Affect the time or space of an area or another's area, specifically

Level 6 – Move/Remove/Shift the time or space in a partial way

Wood Element

Level 1 – Detect good/bad health; Detect shape shifting; Alter one minor characteristic on self or another

Level 2 – Analyze self or other minutely; Alter several minor characteristics on self or another

Level 3 – Minor Healing of self or other; Shift certain features of self or other

Level 4 – Shape self or another; Healing

Level 5 – Convert limbs to weapons; Cure diseases; Create doppelgangers

Level 6 – Change into an animal form or cause another to; Totally Regenerate health

Metal Element

Level 1 – Detect technology, manmade materials

Level 2 – Examine technology; Turn on/Turn off a machine

Level 3 – Create/Change/Destroy a hand full of manmade materials; Control a machine

Level 4 – Control machines; Create/Change/Destroy manmade materials the mass of the user

Level 5 – Manipulate complex machines (like computers); Create/Change/Destroy manmade materials the size of a car

Level 6 – Multitask (Controlling machines over the area of a house);

Create/Change/Destroy manmade materials the size of a house

Spirit (or the Ephemeral) Element

Level 1 – Detect supernatural entities (angels, ghosts, daemons) through smell and possibly touch; Detect possession; Detect supernatural influence on a human

Level 2 – See/Hear angels, ghosts, daemons; Detect strongest Element in individual

Level 3 – Communicate with supernatural beings; Give dreams or visions to a human

Level 4 – Summon/Banish a supernatural entity; Commune with mortal soul (human)

Level 5 – Demand a task from a supernatural; Remove possessing being; Protect human from possession; Cause possession to occur

Level 6 – Enslave supernatural; Cause resurrection or death of human being (not always granted)

Elemental Levels Open Only to the Spirits

The Elements can be manipulated at higher levels, but only the spirits (angels, ghosts, daemons, the Adversary, and the Creator) can accomplish these extreme feats. One dice is added at each Level, so Level 7 = 4 ten-sided dice for damage or success, while Level 10 = 7 ten-sided dice for damage or success.

Level 7 – cherubim, daemons, and ghosts can accomplish (worldwide effects, generally)

Level 8 – seraphim, devils, and ghosts can accomplish (universal, generally)

Level 9 – Archangels and arch devils (no ghost has attained this level—more than one universe at once)

Level 10 – the adversary (satan, the devil, Lucifer, etc.) (can accomplish most anything, but the Creator must okay it); the Creator (decides if any of these powers will work at all—able to affect reality at will)

Much of this is, obviously, left up to the GM. Would the Creator agree to it? Remember, the Creator has granted all spirits free will. However, that does not mean that the characters, the angels, the daemons, or the ghosts will always be able to perform their Elemental manipulation. Quite the contrary, the Creator decides on a case by case basis whether these powers will even function or not. Some atheists, for example, are not allowed to experience miracles at all. No power will function in his or her presence. This is ultimately up the GM to use as s/he sees best.

Character's Element Level

A character's level measures how much control he has over his spark (his power over the universe around him). Most game masters will want to start the characters at 3rd level, as levels 1 and 2 generally limit the powers to detection and sensing. While this is interesting too, real power tends to begin at the 3rd level. For X-Files-ish games, levels 1 and 2 might be very appropriate. Average games will probably start at the 3rd level, as this is where the characters begin to see incontrovertible proof of their own ability to manipulate the stuff of the universe (at least over one Element of it). Game masters can even start at even higher levels; but, this is not suggested, as players may take for granted their character's growth. Above 6th level

powers are possessed by angels, ghosts, and daemons. The high ultimate powers of the Creator and the Adversary can sometimes be witnessed or even channeled by the actions of the characters, but characters always play human beings. And, this “channeling” would be extremely rare (totally up to the GM here). Characters’ powers can only possibly reach the 6th level. However, deals with supernatural beings (angels, daemons, ghosts, the adversary and the Creator) can produce effects above the 6th level, which are caused by those spirits, assuming the Creator allows it at all.

Character Level works like this:

- 1st level is 50% likely to succeed,
- 2nd level is 60% likely to succeed,
- 3rd level is 70% likely to succeed,
- 4th level is 80% likely to succeed,
- 5th level is 90% likely to succeed,
- 6th level is 100% likely to succeed.

For example, if a 4th level character attempts to silence the sound around him (Affect Sound #4, as this character can use first level, second level, third level, and fourth level because of his level is four), the player controlling that character would roll 1d100 (two 10-sided dice rolled together, with one declared the tens column and one declared the ones column before rolling; 00 = 100, 01=one). If the number rolled is 81 or above, the silence does not work at all. If the number rolled is 80 or less, the silence works. The GM can modify this roll or decide that the Creator has decided not to let the power work at all, for whatever reason. As there is even the chance that unbelievers may be present (within sight range, usually), and Miracles may not work at all (up to the game master). The Game Master can also apply basic modifiers to rolls (generally, plus or minus 30 percentiles), as appropriate.

Example of Combat

Twyla (a “crusader” who harnesses her power over the Wood Element) is in a bar. Twyla takes another sip of her tequila fizz. Bored, she glances around the room, employing her power to see if she detects any shape shifters. It doesn’t happen that often, but you never know. Dave rolls a 34 for Twyla; well under the 80% Twyla gets for being 4th Level. Strangely enough, Twyla notices a greenish tinge to the aura around one of the patrons, a handsome guy in a sport coat. She suspects (with good reason) that he or someone or something has changed his form somewhat.

Curious, Twyla crosses the smoky room towards him. The dark-haired man seems nervous (as he just rolled 03 for his 2nd Level power over the Spirit Element—he detects her as not being a normal human). The GM calls for Agility attribute roll. Twyla misses her roll. The stranger makes his. He produces a gun.

Another Agility roll (Twyla makes it. Stranger does not). Twyla wills the stranger to have a sharp pain in his hand, so that he will drop the gun. She makes the roll. The stranger drops the gun, as people start to flee.

Another Agility roll is made. (Twyla makes it. Stranger doesn’t.) Twyla punches the stranger. At the same time, she causes a semi-heart attack in the stranger. (She succeeds at both, to hit and to activate her

power). Dave rolls two dice for the damage of the heart attack-like maneuver. The man drops like a sack of potatoes, twitching in pain until he finally stops. Twyla tells someone to call an ambulance, but she knows that he's probably dead. She rushes away, not really wanting to explain why someone pulled a gun on her to the police.

Damage and Health

Endurance divided by 10 (round down) = the number of health points your character has. So, 1-9 is pretty normal. Flak jackets and armor can be worn. That provides its rating worth of damage before the damage makes it through to the individual.

Damage can be caused by any number of things. Typically, damage done by a fist or kick is one point of health worth of damage. A knife is usually two points, but a sword does three. Pistols generally do one ten-sided die worth of damage. Rifles generally do two ten-sided die worth of damage. Submachine guns generally do three-ten-sided die worth of damage (this weapon allows for multiple targets, but the skill must be

divided evenly among them & rolled separately for each). Damage of more exotic weapons is up to the game master.

Damage can be healed one point per day. The Wood Element is extremely useful for healing, as a 3rd Level healer can heal 1d10 damage per round to herself or to another.

The Spirit World Defined

The Spirit World is that place where angels, daemons, and ghosts actually exist. This locale exists synonymously with ours. Generally, the frequency with which these spirits reverberate also determines what they experience on a day-to-day basis. Spirits are completely immaterial beings. Unless one has chosen to materialize, possess a body, et cetera, these beings cannot be affected physically.

Spirits can move through objects in the real world with no problem. They also are able to fly, though the rate of speed could change from time to time, according to the Game Master. Angels, daemons, or ghosts can also make use of the Element to which they are attuned. Generally, these function in the same way they do for “crusaders” (the characters), unless the

Game Master deems otherwise. Remember: any power used can be stopped, if the Adversary or the Creator wishes it to be so. The Adversary can be overruled by the Creator, however, ALWAYS.

Both the angels and the daemons have a hierarchy of sorts. Ghosts are, generally, more independent. Angels called cherubim (visualize as humans with two white wings) generally oversee the earth. Angels called seraphim (visualize as scary human-like beings with three pairs of wings) act as messengers and oversee other places besides the earth. Archangels are the leaders of the angels. The Creator directs the angels sometimes, though they do have free will. Humans can become angels, daemons, or ghosts after death, though there are original angels/daemons that are not human.

Daemons are given to ruling the earth. They are ruled by the devils. Arch devils act as the generals behind the enterprise. The Adversary is much more hands-on than the Creator, although occasionally he disappears to work on personal projects.

Alternate Settings

Picking Sides can be played in different places, time periods, other planets, etc. Those periods explored in my novel were: western times, 1800s, 1920s, modern times, aboard an alien vessel, in a glorious future, and in a post-apocalyptic setting. Other places between Heaven and hell are mentioned. Feel free to explore the possibilities.